# The Stolen Singer

By Martha Bellinger



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so, at the stage where he was mentioned now and then in the literary journals. But Jim stuck to shoes and kept the family on a fair tide of modest prosperity.

Once, in the years of Jim's apprenticeship to life, there came over him a fit of soul-sickness that nearly proved his ruin.

"I can't stand this," he wrote to Aleck Van Camp; "it's too hard and dry and sordid for any man that's got a soul. It isn't the grind I mind, though that is bar enough; it is the 'Commercial Idea' that eats into a man's innards. He forgets there are things that money can't buy, and in his heart he grows contemptuous of anything to be had 'without money and without price.' He can't help it. If he is thinking of trade nine-tenths of the time, his mind gets set that way. I'm ready any minute to jump the fence, like father's old colt up on the farm. I'm not a snob, but I recognize now that there was some reason for all our old Hambleton ancestors being so finicky about trade.

"Do you remember how we used to talk, when we were kiddies, about keeping our ideals? Well, I believe I'm bankrupt, Aleck, in my account with ideals. I don't want to howl, and these remarks don't go with anybody else, but I can say to you, I want them back again."

Aleck did as a kiddie should do, writing much advice on long sheets of paper, and illustrating his points richly, like a good Scotchman, with scientific instances. A month or two later he contrived to have work to do in Boston, so that he could go out to Lynn and look up Jimmy's case. He even devised a cure by creating, in his mind, an office in the biological world which was to be offered to James on the ground that science needed just his abilities and training. But when Aleck arrived in Lynn he found that Jim, in some fashion or other, had found a cure for himself. He was deeper than ever in the business, and yet, in some spiritual sense, he had found himself. He had captured his ideal again and yoked it to duty—which is a great feat.

After twelve years of ferocious labor, with no vacations to speak of, James' mind took a turn for the worse. Physically he was as sound as a bell, though of lath-like thinness; but an effervescing in his blood lured his mind away from the study of lasts and accounts and Parisian models and sent it careering, like Satan, up and down the earth. Romance, which had been drugged during the transition from youth to manhood, awoke and coaxed for its rights, and whispered temptingly in an ear not yet dulled to its voice. Freedom, open spaces, laughter, the fresh sweep of the wind, the high buccaneering piracy of life and joy—these things beglamoured his senses.

So one day he locked his desk with a final click. The business was in good shape. It is but justice to say that if it had not been, Romance had dangled her luring wisp o' light in vain. Several of his new schemes had worked out well, his subordinates were of one mind with him, trade was flourishing. He felt he could afford a little spin.

Jimsy's radiating fancies focussed themselves, at last, on the vision of a trig little sail-boat, "a jug of wine, a loaf of bread" in the cabin, with possibly a book of verses underneath the bow, or more suitably, in the shadow of the sail; and Aleck Van Camp and himself astir in the rigging or plunging together from the gunwale for an early swim. "And before I get off, I'll hear a singer that can sing," he declared.

He telegraphed Aleck, who was by this time running down the eyelid of the squid, to meet him at his club in New York. Then he made short work with the family. Experience had taught him that an attack from ambush was most successful.

"Look here, Edith"—this was at the breakfast-table the very morning of his departure. Edith was sixteen, the tallest girl in the academy, almost ready for college and reckoned quite a queen in her world—"You be good and do my chores for me while I'm away, and I'll bring you home a duke. Take care of mother's bronchitis, and keep the house straight. I'm going on a cruise."

"All right, Jim"—Edith could always be counted on to catch the ball—"go ahead and have a bully time and don't drown yourself. I'll drive the team straight to water, mother and dad and the whole outfit, trust me!"

Considering the occasion and the correctness of the sentiments, Jim forbore, for once, from making the daily suggestion that she chasten her language. By the time the family appeared, Jim had laid out a rigid course of action for Miss Edith, who rose to the occasion like a soldier.

"Mother'll miss you, of course, but Jack and Harold"—two of Edith's admirers—"Jack and Harold can come around every day—stout arm to lean upon, that sort of thing. You know mother can't be a bit jolly without plenty of men about, and since Sue became engaged she really doesn't count. The boys will think they are running things, of course, but they'll see my iron hand in the velvet glove—you can throw a blue chip on that, Jimsy. And don't kiss me, Jim, for Dorothy Snell and I vowed, when we wished each other'srings on—Oh, well, brothers don't count."

And so, amid the farewells of a tender, protesting family, he got off, leaving Edith in the midst of one of her monologues.

There was a telegram in New York saying that Aleck Van Camp would join him in three days, at the latest. Hambleton disliked the club and left it, although his first intention had been to put up there. He picked out a modest, up-town hotel, new to him, for no other reason than that it had a pretty name, The Larue. Then he began to consider details.

The day after his arrival was occupied in making arrangements for his boat. He put into this matter the same painstaking buoyancy that he had put into a dull business for twelve years. He changed his plans half a dozen times, and exceeded them wholly in the size and equipment of the little vessel, and in the consequent expense; but he justified himself, as men will, by a dozen good reasons. The trig little sail-boat turned out to be a respectable yacht, steam, at that. She was called the Sea Gull. Neat in the beam, stanch in the bows, rigged for coasting and provided with a decent living outfit, she was "good enough for any gentleman," in the opinion of the agent who rented her. Jim was half ashamed at giving up the more robust scheme of sailing his own boat, with Aleck; but some vague and expansive spirit moved him "to see," as he said, "what it would be like to go as far and as fast as we please." While they were about it, they would call on some cousins at Bar Harbor and get good fun out of it.

The idea of his holiday grew as he played with it. As his spin took on a more complicated character, his zest rose. He went forth on Sunday feeling as if some vital change was impending. His little cruise loomed up large, important, epochal. He laughed at himself and thought, with his customary optimism, that a vacation was worth waiting twelve years for, if waiting endowed it with such a flavor. Jim knew that Aleck would relish the spin, too. Aleck's nature was that of a grind tempered with sportiness. Jim sat down Sunday morning and wrote out the whole program for Aleck's endorsement, sent the letter by special delivery and went out to reconnoiter.

The era of Sunday orchestral concerts had begun, but that day, to Jim's regret, the singer was not a contralto. "Dramatic Soprano" was on the program; a new name, quite unknown to Jim. His interest in the soloist waned, but the orchestra was enough. He thanked Heaven that he was past the primitive stage of thinking any single voice more interesting than the assemblage of instruments known as orchestra.

Hambleton found a place in the dim vastness of the hall, and sank into his seat in a mood of vivid anticipation. The instruments twanged, the audience gathered, and at last the music began. Its first effect was to rouse Hambleton to a sharp attention to details—the director, the people in the orchestra, the people in the boxes; and then he settled down, thinking his thoughts. The past, the future, life and its meaning, love and its power, the long, long thoughts of youth and ambition and desire came flocking to his brain. The noble confluence of sound that is music worked upon him its immemorial miracle; his heart softened, his imagination glowed, his spirit stirred. Time was lost to him—and earth.

The orchestra ceased, but Hambleton did not heed the commotion about him. The pause and the fresh beginning of the strings scarcely disturbed his ecstatic reverie. A deep hush lay upon the vast assemblage, broken only by the voices of the violins. And then, in the zone of silence that lay over the listening people—silence that vibrated to the memory of the strings—there rose a little song. To Hambleton, sitting absorbed, it was as if the circuit which galvanized him into life had suddenly been completed. He sat up. The singer's lips were slightly parted, and her voice at first was no more than the half-voice of a flute, sweet, gentle, beguiling. It was borne upward on the crest of the melody, fuller and fuller, as on a flooding tide.

"Free of my pain, free of my burden of sorrow,
At last I shall see thee—"

There was freedom in the voice, and the sense of space, of wind on the waters, of life and the love of life.

Jimsy was a soft-hearted fellow. He never knew what happened to him; but after uncounted minutes he seemed to be choking, while the orchestra and the people in boxes and the singer herself swam in a hazy distance. He shook himself, called somebody he knew very well an idiot, and laughed aloud in his joy; but his laugh did not matter, for it was drowned in the roar of applause that reached the roof.

Jim did not applaud. He went outdoors to think about it; and after a time he found, to his surprise, that he could recall not only the song, but the singer, quite distinctly. It was a tall, womanly figure, and a fair, bright face framed abundantly with dark hair, and the least little humorous twitch to her lips. And her name was Agatha Redmond.

"Of course, she can sing; but it isn't like having the real thing—'tisn't an alto," said Jimsy ungratefully and just from habit.

The day's experience filled his thoughts and quieted his restlessness. He awaited Aleck with entire patience. Monday morning he spent in small necessary business affairs, securing, among other things, several hundred dollars, which he put in his money-belt. About the middle of the afternoon he left his hotel, engaged a taxicab and started for Riverside. The late summer day was fine, with the afternoon haze settling over river and town. He watched the procession of carriages, the horseback riders, the people afoot, the children playing on the grass, with a feeling of comradeship. Was he not also tasting freedom—a lord of the earth? His gaze traveled out to the river, with the glimmer here and there of a tug-boat, a little steamer, or the white sail of a pleasure craft. The blood of some seagoing ancestor stirred in his veins, and he thrilled at the thought of the days to come when his prow should be headed offshore.

The taxicab had its limitations, and Hambleton suddenly became impatient of its monotonous slithering along the firm road. Telling the driver to follow him, he descended and crossed to where Cathedral Parkway switches off. He walked briskly, feeling the tonic of the sea air, and circled the cathedral, where workmen were lounging away after their day's toil. The unfinished edifice loomed up like a giant skeleton of some prehistoric era, and through its mighty open arches and buttresses Jim saw fleecy clouds scudding across the western sky. A stone saint, muffled in burlap, had just been swung up into his windy niche, but had not yet discarded his robes of the world. Hambleton was regarding the shapeless figure with mild interest, wondering which saint of the calendar could look so grotesque, when a sound drew his attention sharply to earth. It was a small sound, but there was something strange about it. It was startling as a flash in a summer sky.

Besides the workmen, there was no living thing in sight on the hillside except his own taxicab, swinging slowly up the avenue at that moment, and a covered motor-car getting up speed a square away. Even as the car approached, Hambleton decided that the strange sound had proceeded from its ambushed tonneau; and it was, surely, a human voice of distress. He stepped forward to the curb. The car was upon him, then lumbered heavily and swiftly past. But on the instant of its passing there appeared, beneath the lifted curtain and quite near his own face, the face of the singer of yesterday; and from pale, agonized lips, as if with dying breath, she cried, "Help, help!"

Hambleton knew her instantly, although the dark abundance of her hair was almost lost beneath hat and flowing veil, and the bright, humorous expression was blotted out by fear. He stood for a moment rooted to the curb, watching the dark mass of the car as it swayed down the hill. Then he beckoned sharply to his driver, met the taxicab half way, and pointed to the disappearing machine.

"Quick! Can you overtake it?"

"I'd like nothing better than to run down one o' them Dook machines!" said the driver.

To be continued





## GUARDS WOODROW WILSON

Richard Jervis, better known as "Dick," is the secret service operative who is now guarding Woodrow Wilson, the president-elect.

### BIG DEMAND FOR BRICKS.

Whitesburg, Ky.—The brick plant of the Consolidation Coal company, at McRoberts, the new industrial city on Wrights Fork, has increased its output to 50,000 bricks a day, and is still barely able to supply the vast building operations in the new city. A Y. M. C. A. building is well under way, a large store building will soon be completed, while hundreds of dwellings are going up. Passenger and freight service over the Lexington & Eastern will begin November 25.



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